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## THE MOTTLED OWL IN CONFINEMENT.

BY C. J. MAYNARD.

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[The following interesting account of this bird was sent me for insertion in my "Birds of North America," which I have in preparation. As it throws considerable light on the disputed question of the color of the bird's plumage in the first year, I send it to the NATURALIST, hoping that it may bring out, from other observers, new facts in relation to this species. In presenting it, I will briefly say that I have found two other birds in the first year's plumage which were decidedly gray; but these are the only instances that I have noticed, although I have examined a great number of specimens. Whether we have two species of *Scops*, or whether the young of *S. asio* are sometimes gray in color, sometimes red, remains still uncertain. My own opinion is that the last hypothesis is the most correct. — E. A. SAMUELS.]

On June 15, 1867, I observed some boys around a small owl which was perched on a stick. On closer examination I found that it was a young Mottled Owl (*Scops asio* Bonaparte). It was staring about in a dazed manner and seemed half stupefied. I easily persuaded the boys to part with it for a trifle, and took it home. I should judge that it was about two weeks old. It was covered with a grayish down. I put it in a large cage, and gave it some meat which it ate, but not readily, for it seemed frightened at the sight of my hand, and at my near approach would draw back, snapping its beak after the manner of all owls. It soon grew tamer, however, and would regard me with a wise stare, as if perfectly understanding that I was a friend.

In a short time it would take food from me without fear; I never saw it drink, although water was kept constantly near it. Its food consisted of mice, birds, and butchers' meat, on which it fed readily. I kept the bird caged for about two weeks, during which time it became quite tame, but would not tolerate handling, always threatening me with its beak when my hands approached it. As the wires of its cage broke its feathers when moving about, and as it hardly

seemed resigned to confinement, I opened its cage and gave it the freedom of the room, leaving the windows open night and day. About this time I gave it the name of "Scops," to which in a little while it would answer, when called, with a low rattle, which sounded like the distant note of the kingfisher.

One morning Scops was missing; diligent search was made for it, but no owl could be found, and, reluctantly, we gave it up for lost. Once or twice it was seen in the neighboring woods by different people, and once on the roof of a barn, but was wild and refused to be caught. It had been absent about a week, when, one morning, I was told that my owl was out in the yard. I hastened out and found a half-grown Newfoundland dog playing with my pet. The owl was clinging to his shaggy fur with its claws, snapping its beak, and biting fiercely. I immediately rescued poor Scops and carried it into the house. It was raining hard, and the bird was wet through. On arriving in its old quarters it seemed pleased, chuckling to itself after its manner. It was almost starved, and ate two full-grown blue-birds at the first meal. After this time I gave it the privilege of going and coming when it pleased, but, mindful of its former experience, it never has but once remained away more than two days at a time. It now became more attached to me than ever, and will, at this time, permit me to pat it gently.

When a bird is given it for food, it takes it in its claws, and with its beak invariably pulls out the wing and tail feathers first, then eats the head, then devours the intestines; then, if not satisfied, it eats the remainder of the bird, feathers and all.

That this owl sees tolerably well in the daytime I have proved to my satisfaction. I caught a mouse and put it alive into an open box about two feet square. This I placed upon a bench near Scops, who was attentively watching my movements; the moment it saw the mouse, the owl opened its eyes wide, bent forward, moved its head from side to

side, then came down with an unerring aim, burying its talons deep in the head and back of the mouse. Looking up into my face, and uttering its rattling note, as if inquiring, "Is'nt that well done?" it flew up to its perch with its struggling prey grasped firmly in its talons, where it killed the mouse by biting it in the head and back. During the whole act it displayed considerable energy and excitement.

Again, I have seen it pounce on a dragon-fly which was unable to fly, but laid buzzing on the bench; the bird went through the same manœuvres as before, striking the dragon-fly with the greatest precision, and with both feet. I think that these instances prove that the bird can see nearly as well in the day as in the night. In both the above instances the sun was not shining on the objects struck, but they were very near the window, and the light was consequently strong.

Scops will, in taking birds from my hand, almost always look up in my face and utter its subdued rattle. In sleeping, it usually stands on one foot, both eyes shut, but sometimes stretches out at full length, resting on its breast. When sound asleep it awakes instantly on its name being pronounced, and will answer as quickly as when awake. I have heard it utter its peculiar quavering note on one or two occasions, which, notwithstanding its reputed mournfulness, has much that sounds pleasant to my ears. When moving along a plane surface, Scops progresses, with a half walk, half hop, which is certainly not the most graceful gait possible.

When out at night among the trees Scops acts in much the same manner as when in the house, hopping from limb to limb, looking about with a quick, graceful motion of the head, sometimes turning the head around so that the face comes directly behind.

When it returns to the house in the morning, daylight is often long passed, and even sunrise. The alarm note is a kind of low moan; this was often uttered at the sight of a tamed

gray squirrel (but with which it has now become better acquainted), and always at the sight of its old enemy, the dog.

While flying, Scops moves through the air with a quick, steady motion, alighting on any object without missing a foothold. I never heard it utter a note when thus moving. When perching, it does not grasp with its claws, but holds them at some distance from the wood, clasping with the soles of the toes. When it has eaten enough of a bird, it hides the remaining portions in any convenient place near by; if its hiding-place is then approached, the owl from its perch watches the intruder jealously, and when its hidden spoils are touched, it lays back its ear-like tufts, snaps its beak once or twice, and drops down on the unlucky hand like an arrow, striking it with its sharp claws until the hand is withdrawn; then, ascertaining that its treasure is safe, Scops resumes its perch, looking at its late disturber with most unfriendly eyes.

Sometimes in the daytime it will take a sudden start, flitting about the room like a spectre, alighting on different objects to peer about, which it does by moving sideways, turning the head in various directions, and going through many curious movements; but it always returns to its perch and settles down quietly.

I once placed a stuffed owl of its own species near it, when it ruffled its feathers, gave a series of hisses, moans, and snappings of the beak, and stretched out one wing at full length in front of its head as a shield to repulse what it took to be a stranger invading its own domains. As the stuffed bird was pushed nearer, Scops budged not an inch, but looked fiercer than ever; its ruffled back-feathers were erected high, its eyes sparkled, and its whole attitude was one of war.

Some time since the building in which my pet was kept was torn down, and the bird was absent for two weeks; but a new building has been erected near the site of the old one, and to-day I found Scops in the new cellar, sitting on a pro-

jecting stone of the wall, as much at home as in the old place. From this it can be seen that its affection for locality is very strong. Notwithstanding Scops' long absence it is as tame as ever, taking its food from my hand, and behaving in the old manner. Its plumage at this time (Oct. 31, 1867) is perfect, most of the feathers having recently changed. It is mostly *gray*; there are but few marks of red, and but a faint wash of cream-color on the back, *not red*.

In your book on the "Birds of New England" are given two instances of this bird's first plumage being in the *red*; but my bird's is decidedly in the *gray*. If it is red at all, it must be at some time hereafter. You also mention one occurrence of the young bird in the gray plumage, and, to give an additional example, I would, for the benefit of students, add one from my own experience.

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## ROCK RUINS.

BY A. HYATT.

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I WAS accosted once by a gray-headed patriarch, sitting at the door of his farm-house, with these words: "I have heard of you, and wished to see you; my neighbors tell me that you are a rock-hunter." After many questions he continued: "I have read nothing but this,"—holding up the well-thumbed family Bible,—*"and seen nothing but that,"*—pointing to the extensive landscape the house afforded,—*"and yet,"* said he, *"a long life spent with them both before me, has given me more to think about than I can master. The rains pour down their floods upon these hills till every little hollow holds a muddy rivulet which empties into that silver thread you see yonder, until it too is a broad, yellow current. It has struck me, stranger, that those rains, in the hands of the Almighty, are the instruments which have cut*